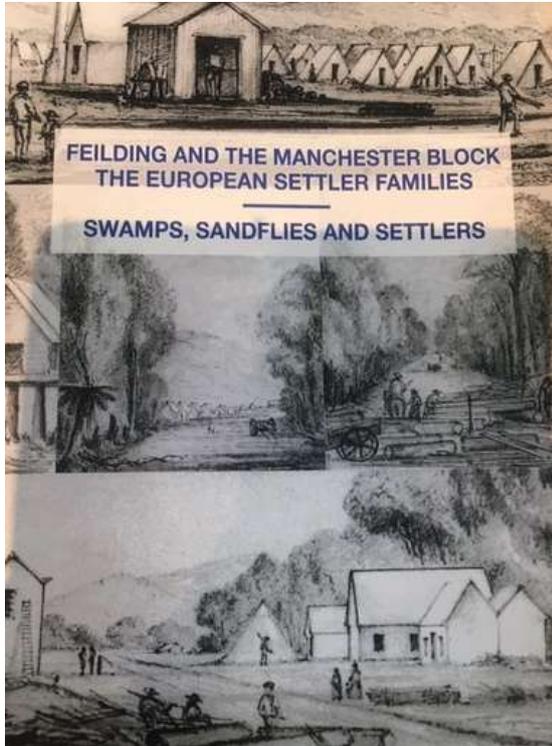


# Settling of the Manchester Block, Feilding

A compilation of Newspaper articles by Dale Hartle



In the book “**Feilding and the Manchester Block – the European Settler Families**” there’s an entry for Charles Pearson. It gives a brief outline of the Pearsons, with the information being supplied by Barry Rush of Wellington and notes from Mrs Dawn Pearson (wife of Arthur Raymond Pearson).

It is clear that Charles and Maria Pearson applied to the Emigrants and Colonists Aid Corporation for selection to be amongst the first settlers of the Manchester Block, eventually to become known as the town of Feilding, along with Maria’s sister Rosina, who travelled to New Zealand with the family.

## Feilding settlement positive from the start

(copied from “Manchester Block 125 years on – a Review by the Fielding Herald of the Past 125 years of the Manchester Block”, a newspaper supplement published on Thursday 28 January 1999)

In 1936 when T. A. Gibson wrote “**The Purchase and Settlement of the Manchester Block**”, he called it a “happy story with a happy ending”. The European settlement of Feilding and surrounding districts is indeed an often-quoted example of a private emigration-immigration enterprise that achieved its objectives in the 1870s. The originators of the Emigrants and Colonists Aid Corporation would no doubt be delighted to visit the Manchester Block today and see the well-established town of Feilding surrounded by green farmland with stock, crops and the odd patch of native bush along with farmhouses in the midst of gardens with splendid trees.

So how did it all begin?

In the 1860s immigration to New Zealand had slowed down. Settlement had taken place mainly on the coast, so that those who had carved out a farm in Auckland could not easily reach those in Wanganui or Wellington overland. Most communication was by coastal shipping.

The Government of the day was keen to get the central North Island settled so roads and railways could be built to connect the existing isolated settlements. However, settling emigrants in the inland North Island was not going to be as easy as establishing the coastal settlements. The bush was dense and the terrain difficult in many areas.

Ideas were being put forward but nothing much happened by 1867 when a group of gentlemen in England began discussing an emigration scheme. The aim of the Emigrants and Colonists Aid Corporation, as the group named themselves, was to relieve the distress of the labouring class in England at that time.

The Duke of Manchester and of his Directors the Earl of Denbigh, the Honourable W Feilding, H C Ashhurst Esq, John Balfour Esc and Secretary C Stuart bailey, saw “empty” colonies on the other side of the world. England was in a state of economic and social upheaval, with widespread unemployment among the labouring classes, particularly those who had been engaged in agriculture. The solution was obvious. The unemployed could emigrate and carve out a new life in the colonies.

Along with this philanthropic aim the venture was also a business proposition.

Large sums of money were required to turn the idea into reality – land must be purchased, emigrants transported, dwellings built for them on arrival, roads and railways built etc. Well run, it could be a sound investment for those who invested in the Corporation. And history records that it was. Investors in the scheme eventually received a return of 5.5 percent on their money.

Among the labouring classes – the potential emigrants the Corporation would try to attract – circumstances were impelling them to make a huge change.

Besides lack of employment and poverty, there were also positive trends that made people more adventurous. Firstly, more of these working-class people were learning how to read and write, mainly thanks to the efforts of non-conformist religious groups such as the Methodist Church. Secondly, a national agricultural

labourers union had been established. Leaders held meetings round the country. In the course of their work they were in contact with emigration authorities and agents themselves. These union leaders were men from working-class families who had become educated and begun to view and live in a different world from that of their own childhood.

So by the beginning of the 1870s the stage was set. The Emigrants and Colonists Aid Corporation was ready to begin looking for suitable land in either Australia or New Zealand for their emigration scheme. After that they would begin recruiting suitable hardworking, honest and morally upright families to become the pioneers on that land.

## **First steps of infant settlement of Feilding**

*Excerpts of report by Mr Halcombe on the progress made by the Emigrants' and Colonists' Aid Corporation in the Colonisation of the Manchester Block Manawatu (Wellington 7 May 1874)*

During the period, some seven years ago, when an agitation in favour of emigration to the colonies was going on in England, a society, called the Emigrant and Colonists' Aid Corporation was formed by a number of noblemen and other influential men, headed by His Grace the Duke of Manchester.

The result of Colonel Feilding's negotiations with the New Zealand Government was the purchase by the Corporation he represented, of the 106,000 acres of the Manawatu District now known as the Manchester Block.

The price agreed to be given to the Corporation for this Block was £75,000, being at the rate of 15s per acre for 100,000 acres, the remaining 6000 acres being allowed for roads and reserves. Under the terms of Colonel Feilding's original contract and subsequent modifications, bills were given for this amount, bearing interest at five percent, and maturing at different periods up to the year 1882. The Corporation agreed to execute all internal surveys at its own cost, and undertook under heavy money penalties, to introduce 2000 immigrants into the colony, and to settle upon its land 2000 statute adults before the April 1, 1887.

The Corporations immigrants are received as a rule at Wellington by myself; and while here the lives of the heads of families are insured in the New Zealand Government Insurance office for £100 each, as a protection to the

Corporation for their indebtedness, and as a provision for the families in case of accident.

They then are forwarded by steamer to Foxton at Government expense. At Foxton they are received by an agent, and lodged for a night, if necessary, at the expense of the Corporation. The next day they are forwarded, with their bedding, to Palmerston, 25 miles by tramway, their heavy luggage following immediately.

Arrived at Palmerston, they are lodged in the depot built by the Corporation, which is capable of holding about 14 families.

They remain at the depot for a day or two until carts can be got to convey them through to Feilding, a distance of 11 miles. The immigrants are charged with the cost of their rations while in the depot, and a charge of 30s per family is made to cover the cost of cartage of people and luggage through to the settlement.

Arrived at the settlement, each family has had up to this time a bell tent supplied, in which they have to live till their houses are ready. Now, however, as winter is approaching, I have had A-huts erected of sawn timber for temporary accommodation, and after one or two more shipments I hope to have the small houses erected.

The immigrants are supplied on the ground with all necessary tools, cooking utensils, and supplies of food, which are charged at

reasonable rates against future earnings, and the men are at once set to work on road making, bush clearing, carpentering, sawing, brick making or brick laying or any other work for which they may be fitted.

I tried to locate the "Duke of Edinburgh" immigrants at once on country sections of land and set them to build themselves temporary habitations out of the materials most ready to hand. A very few days' experience proved to me conclusively that such a course would be fatal to the prosperity of the settlement; and that with so large a number as I had to expect to deal with, settlement under these circumstances would be impossible.

In the first place, all my available land would be taken up at once, and it would be quite impossible to put immigrants into the bush before the road lines were out.

Secondly, the separation of the people made their supply almost impossible, as well as their concentration on any work.

Thirdly, their ignorance of the character of the materials at command, their unhandiness, and the want of tools (unless they incurred a large expenditure for them), and the fact that as a rule only one workman was available to build a shelter for each family, made it almost impossible for them to erect decent houses in any reasonable time.

Moreover, separation means isolation in a country covered with fern and scrub, or even flax and the people lost their way in moving about, and were thoroughly dispirited. Their utter ignorance of the character of the land made them select the worst, or be discontented with the best sections; and I saw nothing but insurmountable difficulties to myself; great discontent and long discomfort to the people themselves, and a waste of valuable time and of some expensive material in the production of an utterly valueless shanty.

I immediately resolved, therefore to concentrate the immigrants and their work about town at first; to erect houses for them at once on terms easy to them, and productive of a fair return for the expenditure; and I look forward to them removing out into the country as the road works opens it up, and after they shall have educated themselves into a knowledge of the country, their work, their prospects, and their real requirements.

I therefore entered into arrangements for the immediate erection of as many cottages as the timber I could obtain, and the carpenters available would allow. There was much difficulty at first, as the timber had to be carted from Palmerston, a distance of 11 miles; and this fact with other disadvantages inseparable from working in a new place, made the first 20 cottages rather expensive. Now however that we have our own sawmill

at work, carpenters at hand, and bricks made on the ground. I am able to lessen the expense, and ascertain exactly the cost of the buildings.

The cottage, 20 x 10 feet, divided into two rooms, weather-boarded, with shingled roof; and brick chimney, I estimate to cost £32, and the acres of the township land on which they are placed have an upset price of £10, equal to £42 in all. By a payment of 7s per week the immigrant makes cottage and ground his freehold property in three years.

I have no fear that the town will be overbuilt. As one occupant leaves a cottage, a newly-arrived immigrant can be placed in it; and I have found, as the result of my experience in New Zealand, that the great difficulty in locating family men in country districts is the want of house-room for them, and therefore that houses, where available, attract population.

As to the class of immigrants sent out – they have been hitherto all labouring men, and I am on the whole well satisfied with them. There is, however, as is likely to be the case even with the most careful selection, a small percentage of people whom I would rather not have to deal with, and who are a source of anxiety to me. But even as to these I am very hopeful, for I find that the sense of present possession of a house and land, and the prospect of an independent future for himself and his family which is here opened out to a

man, has generally a great effect upon his character; and the labourer who in England merely worked for the Saturday night and began the world again on the Monday morning, devotes himself to the accumulation of property, and is rapidly transformed into a careful and thrifty citizen.

Forty weather-boarded buildings have been erected in that time at the Corporation's expense. Four and a half miles of roadway, most of it through dense bush, has been cleared; two miles of road formation has been done, so much of it very heavy work; three small bridges have been erected; and I trust that before the wet weather sets in, the roads formed will have been metalled, in which case our communications will be fairly good during the approaching winter. The material for a large schoolhouse and school-master's residence has been prepared and the buildings are in course of construction; and I have just let a contract for the erection of 40 more houses to be put up at the rate of five per week. I consider the first great difficulties of starting so great an undertaking have now been overcome and I confidently expect a great success as the result of our operations.

During the coming winter I hope to concentrate the work upon the formation of the railway line from Feilding towards Foxton, under the Colonial Government, with a view of the completion of the railway communication between Feilding, and the

Port of Foxton within 18 months' time, and simultaneously it will be my endeavour to open up to Oroua Valley by a road and tramway line northwards from Feilding up the Kimbolton Road, anticipating the establishment of a timber trade so soon as railway communication shall be limited only by the capacity of the shipping at Foxton to carry the timber away.

While on this subject I may observe that I look upon the timber of the Corporation's block as a far more valuable crop than the land will ever hereafter at one time carry, and one which, if properly worked when the means of carriage to Foxton and Wanganui by railway shall be established, will be a source of very large revenue to the Corporation, besides being the means of employing a numerous population for many years to come. I may also state for your information that the tramway which I propose building up the Oroua Valley to the northern boundary of the Manchester Block is but the first step towards tapping the almost inexhaustible forests of timber which stretch as far as the eye can reach for many miles beyond on either side.

I fear, sir, that the length of my remarks may weary you; but the interest of the subject and the importance to the province of the success of this colonising experiment must be my excuse.

***A Follet Halcombe, Agent Emigrant and Colonists Aid Corporation.***

## Duke was a caring man



Who was the Duke of Manchester, the man who became the chairman of the Emigrants and Colonists Aid Corporation?

William Drogo Montagu<sup>1</sup> was the seventh to hold this hereditary title. His home was Kimbolton Castle<sup>2</sup>, in the County of Hampshire, England.

Gibson in "The Purchase and Settlement of the Manchester Block" says this man was a "sincere altruist who had already taken a leading part in the relief of the distress caused by the closing of the Government docks at Deptford."

Adding to this picture of a person who genuinely cared about the wellbeing of those less fortunate than himself, he was also very active in another organisation well known in Feilding today. The Duke was the Grand Prior of the Order of St John in England for 27 years from 1861. During that time spectacular advances were made in the organisation as

the concept of first aid for the injured was coming to the forefront of the public mind, firstly during the Crimean War of 1854-56 and later through the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71.

On the home front, by 1872 the Order of St John was organising ambulance services for workers in the industrial mining and pottery districts of the English Midlands where accidents were a common occurrence.

It was, incidentally, during this period the St John Ambulance Association was formed to train the public in first aid, and the triangular bandage was introduced as being more versatile and suitable for improvisation in first aid situations than the traditional roller bandage.

So the Duke of Manchester was a leader of men, a man open to new ideas and a man prepared to embrace and bring about change.

His contribution to the Emigrants and Colonists Aid Corporation was substantial, not least in financial terms. In September 1873 he made £5,000 mortgage money available to the Corporation at an interest rate of £1 per centum per annum. In March 1875, he made another advance of £1,500.

However, the Duke never purchased any land in the Manchester Block unlike both Colonel Feilding and his brother the Earl of Denbigh, who purchased a total of 12 town sections within the original boundaries of North, South, East and West Streets in August 1878.

<sup>1</sup>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Montagu,\\_7th\\_Duke\\_of\\_Manchester](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Montagu,_7th_Duke_of_Manchester)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kimbolton\\_Castle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kimbolton_Castle)

## **Voyage to the other side of the world**

In all 36 (or possibly 37) ships brought about 1600 settlers under the Emigrants & Colonists Aid Association to the Feilding area between September 1873 and December 1879. For many settlers the ordeal of the long journey in a ship must have been horrific, while for others it was a dream coming true.

Many ships were chartered for the journey and had to

be adapted for carrying people; Often the living quarters were added/ altered while the boats travelled from London to Gravesend en route to New Zealand.

Many of the ships had only sails while others were a combination of steam and sail. Some ships made the trip in just under 50 days, while some very very slow at 5 months, due to disease and accidents.

Of all the sailing ships that brought settlers to New

Zealand in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, only one, the "Euterpe", or as it is now known "*The Star of India*" remains afloat in a maritime museum at San Diego.

The first ship, the "*Duke of Edinburgh*" arrived in Wellington on 28 December 1873 with 31 settlers aboard.

This was followed by seven other ships before the *Euterpe* arrived on 10 August 1874 with 118 settlers.